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Agency News

Women's cognitive pre-release program opens at the Marlin Unit

Beginning September 1, nearly thirty female offenders were transported from units all across the state to the Marlin Unit in Falls County. They became the first participants in a new six-month cognitive pre-release program designed to provide releasing offenders with more of the information, skills and other tools they need to successfully reintegrate into society while leading productive and law-abiding lives.

Similar to the cognitive program the Rehabilitation Programs Division currently offers to male offenders at the Hamilton Unit, the Marlin program addresses many of the obstacles these women will encounter when they return to their communities. RPD Director Madeline Ortiz explained the program's goals, saying "It promotes positive change, positive behavior and responsibility. It also teaches them to recognize the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships."

Program Case Manager Irvanette Lofton has been on the unit since August preparing for this first group of 28 women and is excited about the program's potential for success,

saying "It's just a really great program. From relationships, talking to authority figures, money, budgeting, communicating and helping, everything they learn in this program can be applied when they release."

Some of the topics covered by the curriculum include parenting, anger management, women's health, responsible thinking and employment preparation. Program participants work together to plan household budgets, practice job interviewing skills and participate in role-playing exercises designed



As part of the new Female Cognitive Pre-release Program at the Marlin Unit, Case Manager Irvanette Lofton helps offenders learn skills such as budgeting and household management.

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to help them make better choices. Lofton also pointed out one of the new program's strengths, saying "Because they come from such diverse backgrounds, coming into this group gives them the opportunity to learn how to adjust to a new environment and new personalities. They learn how to work as a team and learn from each other." She explains that simple manners like saying "please" and "thank you" and taking turns are unfamiliar to many of them.

When they arrive, Lofton meets with each offender individually and creates a personalized treatment plan, which will address their needs while in the program and once they're released. Regular meetings help ensure the women are working toward their goals, which may include finding a job or enrolling in a substance abuse program in the community.

Lofton says that even in the short time the Marlin program has been active, she has seen a big difference in the offenders. "It's amazing. The way they address you and speak to you is different from when they first arrived. The way they walk and carry themselves is different. They even take more pride in their appearance. You can see the transformation."

The Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles votes on placement in the program and completion is a condition of parole. The Marlin program has a new class of 40 women arriving in December. ●



Ms. Lofton meets with offenders one-on-one to discuss their progress through the program.